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# AN HOUR

## WITH HENRY P. VAN DUSEN

World Famous Champion of Christian Cooperation

by Daniel Walther

*Professor of Church History, Andrews University*

Whenever one meets Dr. Henry Pitney Van Dusen, one senses at once a vigorous personality animated by strong convictions and a sturdy zest for life. This is apparent in all his endeavors, especially his active participation in ecumenical debate, where he exerts a commanding role. In this dynamic personality there is an earnest concern for the kingdom of God, particularly its unity, which he defends with profound conviction whenever he finds a platform.

A mere furtive look at his *curriculum vitae* reveals numerous achievements: writing, teaching, administration, ministry, and other activities for which he has received many awards, including sixteen doctor's degrees.

He was born in Philadelphia and spent a studious youth there. As honor student at Princeton, he found many outlets for his active nature in university forums. Naturally he was the university orator and captain of the debating team. Debating is one element in which Van Dusen is at his best. The same scholastic success he enjoyed at Princeton accompanied him in graduate studies elsewhere, especially in Edinburgh, Scotland. During his visit there in 1931 he married Elizabeth C. Bartholomew. He was ordained at the age of twenty-seven in the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York.

His most effective contribution was made to Union Theological Seminary, New York, from 1926 to 1963 as professor of Systematic Theology and as president from 1945 to 1963.

His trips all over the world are so numerous that one can hardly keep up: inspection tours, delegate to ecumenical meetings; chairman of the study program of the first assembly of the World Council of Churches at Amsterdam, 1948, and in the same capacity at the second assembly in Evanston, Illinois, 1954, and the third World Council in New Delhi, 1961.

His administrative gifts are solicited by many institutions to which he generously offers his counsel. Some of these are the American Association of Theological Seminaries, over which he presided for several years; the Board of Foreign Missions (Presbyterian) of the Federal Council of Churches; and the National Council of Churches, where he led out in the program of foreign missions.

He has officially terminated his administrative duties, but his activities continue as before—as adviser, writer, and member of several educational and international boards. He has just concluded another trip around the world inspecting theological institutions. From that trip he sent reports in the form of travel letters, giving vivid descriptions of events, people, and conditions. In Burma, for example, he noted that, with a population of some

twenty million, there is a membership of 131,000 Catholics and 400,000 Protestants—all Christians making up about 2 percent of the population.

Where there is a session of the World Council of Churches, one may expect to hear and meet Dr. Van Dusen. At the last meeting of the United States Chapter of the World Council, it was my pleasure to meet him again.

As usual, the meetings were held in the spacious and comfortable "Inn" of Buckhill Falls in Pennsylvania's beautiful Pocono hills. In these quiet surroundings one listens to reports, speeches, and committee actions. Among the 133 delegates, representing thirty-eight churches, it is not always easy to get to Dr. Van Dusen. However, as an experienced administrator and Christian gentleman, he is always available sooner or later for a conversation, which in my case ran as follows:

*Dr. Van Dusen, what was your observation on Western leadership in foreign missions?*

By an inescapable process of attrition the churches in Asia will soon be stripped completely of all foreign leadership. Since World War II the church is faced with a radically different situation. The white man's prestige is on the wane everywhere.

*While national leadership may not be altogether in the style of Western business efficiency, the results of national leadership may be as good, if not better, don't you think?*

National leadership is all we've got. And it is surprisingly good. For example, the Burma Divinity School must face the challenge of training carefully men and women for the ministry, essential for faculty posts and the building up of an indigenous ministry. As three years ago, I was charmed afresh by these winsome, gay, simple Christians and I was moved and uplifted by the singing of their choirs. In fact, it was the finest singing of Christian music, both classical and national, I have ever heard.

*Is there sufficient ministerial help available, speaking especially of Asia?*

There is a desperate shortage of fully trained pastors. In Thailand, for a Protestant constituency of 20,000 members in 136 congregations, there are exactly six pastors.

*What about Indonesia, which you visited recently? What is the economic condition of the country?*

Precarious. Inflation is rampant. The black market, especially in currency, is flourishing. The highest paid theology professor receives

(Continued on page 30)



the fugitive from justice, who had been described as "one of the most wanted men on the North American continent," was arrested on board his yacht by FBI agents and the local police.

Told how he had been tracked down, LeMay ejaculated, "Well, isn't that something! It took a satellite to catch me."

Very soon there will be no place to hide from the "long arm" of the television satellite, the product of human ingenuity. Even more certain is the Bible's warning that every evil deed, every sinful utterance, is being faithfully set down in the heavenly records against the day of judgment.

Dare we longer harbor the illusion that because we have been able to cover up the record of our sins from the eyes of men, we will never be confronted by them? If we cherish any such notion, let the warning of "Early Bird" sink deep into our hearts. The record of our sins is completely and accurately preserved in heaven; and one day the "books" will be opened, and we will be "judged out of those things that are written" therein. Revelation 20:12.

Wise are those who, while there is time, send their confessed sins "before to judgment," (1 Timothy 5:24), pleading for forgiveness through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. If we do, these sins will be dealt with so finally that they will never confront us in the judgment. Instead, when Christ appears in glory, the all-seeing eye of God will search us out as His faithful children, and we will be gathered by the angels to be forever with the Lord. Matthew 24:31; 1 Thessalonians 4:17. [END]

## New Look at the Bible

(Continued from page 10)

Bibles, where men groped in darkness, without God, without Christ, and without hope. The sight awakened him. Such a spectacle should awaken us, too.

The Bible will do much for us if we expose ourselves to its influence.

"The Bible is the most wonderful book in the world. In the whole realm of literature there is nothing to equal this marvelous collection of history, anthropology, ethics, poetry, philosophy, and prophecy. Spiritually, as its name implies, it is *the* Book—beside it there is none other. It has been called the Book that nobody knows, yet how much there is in its inexhaustible treasures for the wisest yet to know! One of the supremely wonderful things about this wonderful Book is its unusual appeal. . . .

"The Bible speaks to every man in his own tongue: Each age has its own problems, each race its own idioms, yet there is no age and no race which does not respond to the appeal of the Bible; its appeal to every level of intellect, for the simple and unlearned find within it things that are hidden from the wise and prudent, and the greatest minds are lost in its abiding mysteries. It speaks to Everyman in his own tongue because it is *true*, absolutely, to life. Everyman can see himself in the Bible."—Dr. D. M. Blair, Glasgow University, cited in *The National Message*, August 13, 1949.

An old highlander of Scotland gave this personal testimony to Claudius Buchanan: "I cannot argue with you; I can't present facts or reasons; I can't explain the philosophy of religion; but I know this, that when I was a man of

evil character, the Bible got hold of me and quelled the tiger in me."

That is what the Bible has been doing through the ages. The psalmist testified: "Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee." And from the wealth of his own experience he gave this wise instruction: "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to Thy Word." Psalm 119:11, 9. Breadth of intellect, nobility of character, balanced judgment are the result of taking the Bible as our source of counsel.

Winston Churchill aptly wrote: "We believe that the most scientific view, the most up-to-date and rationalistic conception, will find its fullest satisfaction in taking the Bible story literally. . . . We may be sure that all these things happened just as they are set out according to Holy Writ. In the words of a forgotten work of Mr. Gladstone, we rest with assurance upon 'the impregnable rock of Holy Scripture.'"—*Thoughts and Adventures*, page 249.

[END]

## An Hour With Henry P. Van Dusen

(Continued from page 21)

less than \$15 U.S. a month, the lowest, less than \$2. The average may be \$10. The minimum subsistence calls for \$30; therefore, every theology professor holds two or three jobs in order to survive.

### What of the religious situation?

Indonesia has one of the largest Christian populations of any nation on earth, outside of Europe and the Americas. There are 5,000,000 Protestants, about 5 percent of the population, while Catholicism claims about 3,500,000 members. There are thirty-five different autonomous Protestant churches endeavoring to function unitedly. At the northern tip of the island of Celebes is the fabulous church of the Minehasa, numbering nearly half a million Protestants, over 80 percent of the population. At the opposite end of the arc, in northern Sumatra, is the even larger and hardly less notable Batak Christian Protestant Church with a membership of some 800,000, while lesser bodies bring the Christian population on that island to close to a million and a half. I was fortunate to visit for the first time those two remote and fascinating churches.

### Is there any trace of separation of church and state?

Indonesia is an overwhelmingly Moslem nation and there is a most intimate interlocking of church and state, with some privileges for the churches. In return, loyalty to the nation's basic principles and programs is expected. In the Theological Seminary of Indonesia the only decoration on the chapel wall is a more-than-life-size portrait of the president. The "principles" of a typical theological college are defined thus:

1. The principles of truth, life, and faith as revealed in the Old and New Testaments;

2. *Pantjasila* (five principles of the state) as the manifesto politic and aim of the Republic of Indonesia.

Among the required courses in every theological seminary is "The Philosophy of State" (or "Civic Ethics"), with a prescribed syllabus of education and indoctrination in national ideals. Most Christians welcome government



recognition and rejoice in the unprecedented opportunities for the churches. On the other hand, in all probability, some look with dismay at Indonesia's abrupt withdrawal from the UN and the worsening relations with Malaysia.

*Coming back to the ecumenical trends in the West today, what do you think of a possible merger of some of the large denominations?*

I am not as much interested in merger as I am in church cooperation. There is great ground for hope today. We have made significant progress in the cooperation of Christian churches in America and other parts of the world, but we should do more.

*What is your opinion concerning evil today? Do you think it has increased in our generation? Are the youth of today worse?*

The youth (and adults, too) of today have gone far toward moral deterioration, especially in the United States. For example, I hesitate to take a walk alone on Morning-side Drive. I did not have this feeling of insecurity before, and I do not have it when I take a stroll in some other areas of the world.

Another meeting of the Council is announced, and I sense the professor's impatience to return to where the action is.

If I were to think of Dr. Van Dusen's most specific contribution to the Christian cause, it would be his vigorous effort to convince others that Christians everywhere must cooperate. He feels that theological hairsplitting is a luxury we can ill afford. If a merger of the large churches is not yet in sight, Dr. Van Dusen urges at least a constructive dialogue for fuller Christian witnessing. A mere reading of the titles of his numerous publications indicates his inmost concern: "God in These Times," "What Is the Church Doing?" "World Christianity," "Our Great Ground of Hope," "They Found the Church There," et cetera.

Consistently Dr. Van Dusen refrains from appealing exclusively to the old historic churches. He welcomes cor-

dially the cooperation and dialogue of newer churches and those which are considered "sects." One day, in a session of the World Council, defending precisely this point of view, he said: "After all, are we not all sects? The sixteenth-century Protestants were sectarians and schismatics, as Luther expressed it, issued from Roman Catholicism. And Christianity itself—is it not a sect of Judaism?" While opinions on many concepts may differ, the vision of a cooperating church is greatly enhanced by the energetic leadership that Henry P. Van Dusen is giving to those who are eager to "march together," welcoming all who serve and worship Jesus Christ our Lord. [END]

## The Wonder of Being Born

(Continued from page 27)

their tissues. Part of this bypass system consists of an opening directly through the partition that separates the right side of the heart from the left. Before birth a considerable stream of blood passes through this opening.

At the time of a babe's first cry, as the lungs expand, the pressures of blood within the various chambers of the heart change. This permits the soft tissues on either side of the opening just mentioned to come into contact with each other and close the opening. Thereafter the pulmonary artery which serves the lungs receives as great a volume of blood as does the aorta, which is the large artery which supplies all other parts of the body. Here is another evidence of the wonder of being born.

Finally let us notice what childbirth means to a mother.

As far as a woman's body is concerned, childbirth requires many marvelous adaptations. Foremost among these is the inherent and unique shape of the female pelvis which now forms the firm support for the birth canal through which the child must pass.

But the soft tissues within a woman's pelvis, at times other than childbirth, have other functions to perform. Except at the culmination of pregnancy, the passage between the uterus and the outside is of such small proportions that it seems impossible that it could accommodate an object even half the size of a baby's head.

But marvel of marvels, these soft tissues are capable of relaxing and stretching sufficiently to permit the passage of a baby weighing somewhere between five and ten pounds. As though this were not marvel enough, following the birth of the baby they return very nearly to their original size and position.

But a different miracle occurs in the personality when a woman becomes a mother. Typically more sensitive, more responsive, and more tender in attitude than a man, the woman suddenly matures in a way that provides great powers of stamina and endurance, coupled still with the qualities of mercy and patience.

The reality of motherhood makes a woman predominantly unselfish as she now gives first thought and energy without limit to the welfare of the child. Personal sacrifice means little so long as it contributes to the child's interests.

And to this extent, the birth of a child brings a woman closer to God. Thus all members of the family benefit because the attributes of a mother are reflections of the character of God. [END]



## MAN HAD KNOWN

by Hazel Hartwell Simon

*If man had known God would no longer come  
At sundown for their quiet evening talk,  
That there would be no precious Visitor  
With whom, among the lilies, he could walk—  
If man had known how lonely it would be,  
How full of homesick longing he would feel,  
Would he have eaten any kind of fruit  
Whose taste such bitter sorrow could conceal?  
The separation of that twilight hour  
When all the stars of heaven, one by one,  
Were lit, but no one came, and none would come—  
How deeply he must feel what he had done!*